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FROM SOCIALIST MODERNISM TO MARKET MODERNISM?

Master-planned developments in post-reform Vietnam

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Introduction

Since the implementation of reform (Doi moi in Vietnamese) in 1986, Vietnam has rapidly transformed from a central planned economy to a market-oriented economic system. Liberal market mechanisms were introduced, private-sector initiatives encouraged, at the same time as the state still retained its role as the strategic planner and enforcer (The World Bank 2011). A recent phenomenon that is connected to post-Doi moi rapid urban expansion is the growth of master-planned developments at the urban fringe.

New urban areas (NUAs) (khu do thi moi in Vietnamese) have been promoted in the past fifteen years as the model for urban development in post-reform Vietnam (Government of Vietnam 1999, 2006). NUAs are master-planned developments of housing with associated infrastructure and facilities. They are corporate-invested, profit-driven developments that explicitly target the middle and upper income groups in the population. Many are self-contained luxurious enclaves covering vast areas of land in the city’s periphery, transforming the peri-urban landscapes.

Many NUAs in Vietnam emulate or replicate models from more developed Asian economies such as Singapore, Malaysia or Indonesia. Many were built and managed by transnational corporations. One may be tempted to simply attribute this development to the privatization of planning, manifestations of the ascending role of the private sector and market forces, and the retreat of the state (Douglass and Huang 2007; Shatkin 2008). However, considering that these developments are actively promoted by the state of Vietnam as a recipe for modernization of Vietnamese cities, also as a means to regain state control over urban development, the role of the state and its social engineering endeavours in the name of modernization and progress need to be examined.

This chapter examines Vietnam’s urban policies and the development of NUAs in the light of the modernization discourse. Considering its enduring importance in urban
decisions, the modernization discourse needs attention in scholarly analyses of the Global South’s contemporary urban development (Leaf 2015; Söderström 2014). The chapter explores the rationale behind NUA development by local governments, corporate actors, as well as residents, to provide a contextualized interpretation of master-planned developments in Vietnam. In turn, this chapter contributes to an understanding of the complex path-dependent transitional trajectory of Vietnam’s post-reform urban development.

The chapter is based on an analysis of NUA developments in Hanoi, the capital city of Vietnam. It includes a study of Vietnam’s post-reform urban policies, of promotion materials of Hanoi’s NUAs and case studies of four NUAs in Hanoi. The case studies’ materials comprise planning documents, inventories of the built environment, use of space, structured interviews with residents (a total of 48 interviews, 12 from each area) and with representatives from the areas’ management boards (one from each area) as well as in-depth interviews with the residents (24 interviews with 6 residents from each area).

**Modernization as state-craft and as moral admonition**

The will to order is a central feature of modernity (Bauman 1991) and central to modernist urban planning and architecture. The modernist architect Le Corbusier famously declared: “To create architecture is to put into order” (Le Corbusier, quoted in Till 2009: 31). Urban planning and architecture has had a central role in modernization projects in many nations around the world. They have served as effective tools for the state to shape the city’s physical structure and to transform the society in the name of social betterment and progress (Scott 1998). Modernist utopian urban projects such as that of Chandigarh, Brazilia or Dhaka, assume that the formal structure of modernist architecture and planning can transform society, its political structure and people’s way of life in accordance with the universal principles of enlightened modernity (Ong 2011: 213). Images of modernity represent both aesthetics and a moral admonition, a “modernist ethic” (Garrido 2013: 167). In the modernization project, urban forms are endowed with a pedagogic (Söderström 2014: 149) and disciplining role to establish order and prevent disorders.

As the will to order stems from the fear of disorder, the ordering project is inherently exclusionary (Bauman 1991). The modern state propagated some patterns and set to
eliminate others. Ordering involves at times brutal processes of selection: everything that does not fit in needs to be eliminated. Still, the ordering’s rhetoric is powerful, as its promise of a better urban future is inspirational for the majority of urban dwellers, even those who will not benefit directly from the development (Harms 2012; Leaf 2015).

In contemporary cities in the Global South, the rhetoric of modernization and “modern ethic” continues to be the driving force behind state projects that aim to foster a new way of living and a new use of urban spaces. At the same time, modernization projects provide the citizens with new means of being city dwellers and creating their own versions of being in the global world (Garrido 2013; Söderström 2014: 150; Leaf 2015). In many cities in the Global South, modernist ethics form an ideological continuity in the age of globalization (Garrido 2013), particularly when many emergent economies in the South, especially those in Asia, have increasingly become reference points for modernity among politicians, planners and residents (Roy 2011; Söderström 2014: 148).

**Vietnam before *Doi moi*: socialist modernism and state-led social engineering**

Modernist planning and architecture have served as important tools in the Vietnamese government’s efforts to build a modern, orderly and civilized socialist society. Under the direction of the communist party, modernization was considered as a necessary pathway to socialism, Vietnam’s ultimate goal of socio-economic development. A “national and modern socialist architecture” was the directive for urban development (Ngo Huy Quynh quoted in Logan 2000: 59).

With the monopoly over urban planning and housing production and design, the state has centralized power to create urban areas to promote its perceived socialist way of living. ‘Collective’ living areas with apartment buildings and basic public services (*Khu Tap The*, henceforth KTTs), modelled after Soviet planning principles, were promoted. This form of socialist modernism was a means to create the ‘socialist person’ and a ‘socialist’ urban living environment (Tran 1999). Housing was a social benefit and was provided to state employees, based on employment history and rank. The blocks and apartments with identical, monotonous designs providing basic identical living spaces that reflected the ideas of equality and standardization (Figure 19.1). Rental apartments
with shared common facilities, such as a common kitchen for collective food making, represented an ideal of collective living that was considered appropriate for the “new socialist society”. Private ownership of land was frowned upon, and the traditional urban form made up of shop houses lining the streets and its associated lifestyle was considered backward (Tran 1999).

Figure 19.1
A building block in Trung tu KTT
Source: Author.

‘Socialist’ social engineering was also reflected in the various efforts to educate and discipline urban dwellers in the way of living and social conduct. ‘Order’ and ‘civility’ (van minh in Vietnamese) were the most important features of modern living. Both were interrelated and referred to physical spaces as well as social conduct. Orderly, well-organized spatial structures were considered ‘civilized’ as opposed to what was considered the chaos of the backward pre-modern life. Civility meant respect for the rules and being considerate of the social order. The term ‘civilized living’ incorporated a notion of discipline and restraint that was considered necessary for the development of a modern city and country (Harms 2014: 226). There was a wide range of government-initiated programs promoting ‘a civilized lifestyle and cultural family’ (nep song van minh gia dinh van hoa moi) including family planning programs,
vaccination programs, neighbourhood cleaning days, traffic behaviour monitoring programs, among others.

State control penetrated living areas through state bodies such as the Ward authorities, Party cells and state-led organizations such as the women’s union, youth’ unions as well as the state-paid resident committees. These were the state’s extended arms charged with the task of overseeing the application of a ‘civilized lifestyle’ by households and individuals. Since housing was produced and distributed via work units, the work units had great powers in exercising control over the private lives of their employees.

The experiment with ‘collective living’ was not quite successful. The common kitchens that were provided in the apartment design of the early 1960s were abandoned as households prepared their food individually in the corridor instead (Tran 1999). The need for self-contained apartments was acknowledged and individual kitchenettes were provided in apartments that were built from the late 1960s and onwards. State management of the KTTs was also a failure. As rent was only symbolic, there was never enough money to carry out proper maintenance and repair. With an increasing housing shortage, overcrowding was widespread. Apartments were extended and subdivided without permission in order to meet increased housing needs. Illegal subletting and transfer were widely practised (Geertman 2007; Tran and Dalholm 2005). By the mid-1980s, the majority of the KTTs were in decay. They became a symbol for the failure of the state housing provision and management as well as the failure of the idea of a ‘socialist lifestyle’.

Doi moi: modernization and global integration

The economic reform (Doi moi) opened up Vietnam and led to a period of spectacular economic growth and rapid urbanization (The World Bank 2011), yet the modernization agenda is still highly prevalent. To ‘push forward industrialization and modernization with a socialist orientation’ (day manh cong nghiep hoa, hien dai hoa theo dinh huong xa hoi chu nghia) (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2001: 1, emphasis added) is still the primary directive in all the socio-economic development programs of Vietnam since Doi moi. What is new, after many years of isolation, is the goal of ‘integration with the global economy’ (hoi nhap quoc te), which is also seen as a pathway towards modernization. Vietnamese cities are to be developed to meet the
goals of “industrialization, modernization and integration with the global economy” (Prime Minister of Vietnam, 2009: 1). Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) are to be developed into large metropolises, ‘mega-cities’.

Urban landscapes of the city are improved through a range of programs to change ‘the look’ or ‘the appearance’ (dien mao) of cities. For example, programs for ‘embellishment and development of urban areas’ (Chương trình chỉnh trang và phát triển đô thị) in many cities focus on keeping order and improving ‘the look’ of these cities (see, for example, People’s Committee of Hanoi 2009). The programs’ tasks include keeping traffic order, cleaning the streets, improving street lighting, planting trees, and repairing and synchronizing the infrastructure.

Synchronization (dong bo hoa) is the core idea behind these beautification efforts to create an orderly, civilized and modern urban ‘look’. One such effort was the proposal to change the paving tiles of all the sidewalks to consist of only one type, to be applied in both Hanoi and HCMC, to create “the synchronized, and civilized features of the infrastructure, as well as to increase its lifetime” (dantri.com). The imposition of one size and two colours (red and blue) for all shop signs on one street in Hanoi was another example. The district authority argues that the “consistency and harmony in colors” of the shop signs with the colours of the houses along the street would contribute to “urban beauty and order” and create “the appearance of civilization and modernization” (thanhnien.vn 2016). ‘Beauty’ and ‘order’ here are synonyms and they form an underlying modernist ethic, a moral admonition about what is appropriate and what is unfit for the vision of a modern globalized future.

NUAs are one such beautification measure aiming to create orderly and civilized urban spaces through the use of modernist planning. The enforcement of one aesthetic vision necessarily requires the removal or suppression of alternative aesthetics. The imposition of the size and colours of the shop signs in Hanoi disregards marketing rules, brand identity, orientation and other ideas about attractive designs of shop signs (thanhnien.vn 2016). In HCMC, the implementation of the embellishment program means the cleansing of the many slum areas around the waterways in the city (nhandan.com.vn 2016).

**NUAs as state-led modernization project**
**Regaining state control**

Following *Doi moi*, Vietnam’s housing sector has transformed from a state-allocated system to a market-distributed system with a large number of laws, decrees and resolutions being enacted to create an efficient market system to boost housing production (Tran and Yip 2008). The reform measures have triggered a massive boom in housing construction in all Vietnamese cities. The predominant form of production prior to *Doi moi* was self-organization: the majority of houses were financed and built by individuals and households (Geertman 2007). These incremental housing activities have supplied about 70% of the housing stock and greatly contributed to alleviating the housing shortage and improving living standards. However, more than 70% of self-organized housing were built without building permits.

By the end of the 1990s, there was a growing concern over the growth of ‘disorderly’, ‘uncontrolled’, housing development by individuals and households. This development contradicted the national goals of modernization and integration in the global economy (Thanh uy Ha Noi 1998: 3). Urban development in the form of corporate-led ‘projects’, NUAs, to be approved by the local authorities, was proposed as an alternative development strategy, both in order to boost housing production but also for the state to regain control over urban development (Tran, 2015). Private developers, domestic and foreign, were encouraged to invest in NUAs, but it is public companies that are taking the lead.

**Modernist planning**

The idea of *synchronization* is central in new urban area development. New urban areas are to be “*synchronized* urban zones (*khu do thi dong bo*) with technical infrastructure, social infrastructure, residential areas and other services” and are to be developed “in compliance with the approved urban development plan” (Government of Vietnam 1999: 5, 2006: 3).

In a similar way to the KTTs, the planning of NUAs follows modernist planning principles in which land use regulation is the main instrument. There are detailed specifications of land allocation and distribution of various functions such as residential towers, landed houses, services and green spaces (Figure 19.2). Car-dependent, self-sustained enclaves are another modernistic feature. Planned for automobile transportation, the internal roads are very large – 15–35 metres wide (Figure 19.3).
They do not encourage walking, stay or interactions, unlike the traditional shophouse-lined streets of Hanoi.

Figure 19.2

Land use description at Trung Hoa Nhan Chinh New urban area

Drawing by Nguyen Trung Thanh Loi and team.

Housing types and forms of the buildings in NUAs are highly regulated. Some 60% of housing in the areas needs to be high-rise and 40% needs to be villas or town houses. An orderly look is to be achieved with a regulation of building form: “the buildings need to be synchronized, harmonious and orderly” (Ministry of Construction 2008: 3)
(Figure 19.4). To ensure that the areas have an ‘orderly’ built form, NUAs regulations explicitly forbid “the subdivision of land for construction of attached houses” by individual households (Government of Vietnam 2006: 3).

Figure 19.3

(a) Road inside Linh Dam new urban area
Photo by Åsa Svensson.

(b) Section of the main internal road in Linh Dam new urban area
Drawing by Nguyen Trung Thanh Loi and team.
Figure 19.4

The homogenous built form in the new urban areas. Above: one form for the high-rises; below: for the landed houses

Source: Author.

Figure 19.4 shows that by directing housing development towards the form of organized large-scale housing production by the corporate sector, the Vietnam state has not been in retreat, but rather has stepped up its control of nearly every aspect of housing development.
Urban design as a moral admonition: orderly and civilized

The focus on ‘orderly’ development is recurrent in the description of many NUAs.

In the case of Trung Hoa Nhan Chinh (hereafter THNC), one of the first NUAs of Hanoi, the desire to create an orderly development has directed the choice of tenants for the business premises on the ground floor: offices, banks and global chain restaurants are preferred instead of small grocery shops or popular restaurants to avoid disorder caused by the use of the pavement as a shop extension. As it is, current offices or upscale restaurants are built with a raised ground floor that creates a clear demarcation between the buildings and the street (Figure 19.5).

An extreme example of the preoccupation with order and control in the built environment can be found in the case of Ciputra, a vast NUA of almost 400 hectares, Vietnam’s first gated community developed by an Indonesia-based property developer. In addition to housing, it offers a whole lifestyle package, a ‘prestigious’ lifestyle through the provision of “modern facilities, green landscape, professional services” and an “orderly living environment” (Ciputra Residents’ Handbook n.d.). The ‘orderly’ way of living promoted in Ciputra is not only in terms of the physical environment but also
in ‘orderly’ conduct. A thick handbook with hundreds of rules of conduct is distributed to all households upon arrival. It is requested that “All residents are expected to exhibit good and reasonable conduct at all times” (Ciputra Residents’ Handbook n.d.: 111). ‘Tidiness’ and ‘civilized’ behaviour are emphasized, together with many restrictions against playing ball sports, hanging up clothes on the balconies and running in the playground (ibid.: 154). There are security guards on every street corner to make sure such rules are adhered to.

Several residents talked approvingly about the orderly and highly controlled environment of Ciputra as a part of their new civilized lifestyle even though it requires changes in the ways they live their life.

It is required that we have to be disciplined and follow the rules. From how to park, or to follow traffic rules in the traffic junctions, there are guards at the junctions so you cannot turn how you like. And there are very strict rules on fire prevention.

(Interview with 53-year-old female resident of Ciputra)

To another resident, living in Ciputra required more planning and less spontaneity. Before, she could find everything she needed at the local spontaneous market at almost any time, but in Ciputra she goes to the supermarkets twice a month and needs to make plan. She considers this change part of her new civilized life and is willing to adapt. Inconveniences such as the long daily travel and the reduced neighbourly contacts do not affect her positive appreciation of life in Ciputra.

Another resident also highlights the need to change the way of living to adjust to the new lifestyle. While the lack of street foods in Ciputra has been mentioned by some as a slight inconvenience, this resident does not mind since street foods do not belong to the modern lifestyle. “This is a modern area, it cannot have those things, we do not want those things; It is a choice”. She considers the modern lifestyle in Ciputra is superior to living in other areas, and the development of areas such as Ciputra is a step forward in Vietnam’s modernization process.

It is the residents’ modernization dream that led them to support the disciplining of behaviours through the organization of urban spaces, as well as the exertion of top-down and undemocratic planning modes in the NUAs.
Urban designs as social markers

Most NUAs seek to attract middle-class Vietnamese and some NUAs are designed to attract the wealthiest of the urban population. Ciputra clearly states that it seeks to attract wealthy Hanoians and expatriates, “people with money … people with the need to live in an unprecedented residential area, a civilized, modern area with all the services” (interview with a representative of the Ciputra Project Management Board, June 2012).

Ciputra residences are described with terms such as ‘international’, ‘prestigious’, ‘luxury’ and ‘exclusive’. “The prestigious living starts from here … The Central Park Residence sets to deliver a quality living and a peace of mind in exclusive cluster setting”. Exclusionary is presented as part of a prestigious lifestyle: “Walking through the Ciputra Hanoi Estate, residents and guests will feel they are in peaceful oasis away from the hustle and bustle of Hanoi” (Ciputra Hanoi, 2014). Similarly, Vinhomes Riverside’s villa is intended to reflect “the superiority and distinctiveness of the owner”.

Urban design is important for communicating this lifestyle and helps to legitimize profit-making strategy. Order is an important element of this aesthetic of privilege. The homogeneity of the built form, the orderly and well-maintained landscape as well as fanciful public works of art are used to communicate a prestigious lifestyle (Figure 19.6): “Designed meticulously by our project designers with the needs of the residents in mind … The visually beautiful landscaping and gardens surrounding The Link will awaken your senses” (Ciputra Hanoi 2014). The Harmony Vinhomes Riverside explicitly promotes a segregated lifestyle in a “classy villa area with no mix of highrise apartments”.

2
For the residents, well-tended landscaping in Ciputra is an important part of the new lifestyle that they want to be identified with.

The management has created an environment that makes me love the place I live in: the roads are good, there are many guards, the flowers and landscape are well-tended, it makes us feel like we are on holidays, that we can relax and do not have to worry.

(Interview with a 51-year-old female resident, 2013)

Built form and landscaping here are not only about aesthetics but are social markers that help to define and confirm the prestigious social status of the residents.

The social environment in Ciputra is ideal, I must say … it is something intangible but people know who you are just by looking, you feel respected.

(Interview with a 37-year-old male resident)
The discourse of privilege has clearly been used by the developers to sell new housing concepts such as the gated community, safety walls and ’24-hour security’. Advanced security is presented as part of the prestigious design for a villa cluster in Gamuda, a 500 hectare NUA by one of Malaysia’s largest developers:

The whole area is surrounded by a modern fence system equipped with safety lights. The single entrance is guarded day and night by professional security personnel, combined with the access control system using electronic cards to prevent any intrusion by strangers.3

The provision of 24-hour security and the dominant presence of security guards in Ciputra is appreciated by many residents who consider it a quality that belongs to their prestigious lifestyle.

A great thing [about Ciputra] is its very good security system. I live in T2 and it is an area in the second phase and the security is even better than that of the first phase because you have to go through two guarded gates.

(Interview with 34-year-old female resident)

Security in living areas has not been an issue in Hanoi and the traditional organization of Vietnamese dwellings was open and relied on flexible connections between the inside and the outside (Tran 1999). Here, the appeal of high security measures does not so much relate to fear but is a feature of a design strategy that is meant to denote social status.

Global images of modernity and power

The use of referencing as signs and material symbols of modernity, success, as well as notion of a desirable lifestyle, is extensive in NUAs. Soviet urban forms were rejected in favour of international architectural styles and master-planned models of urban development from Europe and successful Asian cities such as Singapore, Hong Kong and Kuala Lumpur.

The My Dinh NUA highlights its European architecture.4 Vinhomes Riverside, developed by Vietnam’s largest real estate corporation, makes use of neoclassical styles and strives to be a “Venice of Hanoi”.5 TimeCity, another investment by the same developer, declares it is inspired by the ecological urban concept from Singapore.6
Splendora, a joint venture between Vietnam’s state-led Vinaconex (n.d.) and Posco E&C of Korea, offers a whole range of symbols of global life. As portrayed in the narrative of the promotional material: “In Splendora, you can find models of economic centers similar to New York, centers for fashion and culture like in Paris, center of tourism and recreation such as Dubai and Sydney, these are symbols of global living”.

Modern aspirations are also reflected in the increasing use of English names for the NUAs, such as Ciputra International City, Timecity, Splendora. Notable is the widespread use of names that evoke power, success and privilege such as The Manor, The Meridians, Golden Westlake, Sun Grand City, Royal City. Also popular are names that reflect the myth of suburban living that is close to nature such as Park Hill, Central Park, Vinhomes Riverside, Mandarin Garden, Gamuda Garden, Camelia Homes, Ecopark.

ParkCity Hanoi and Ciputra Hanoi Vietnam’s International City are replicas of development concepts from Asia’s larger real estate corporations: Malaysia’s Perdana Park City and Indonesia’s Ciputra Group, respectively. Projects that are invested by domestic developers also employ planners and urban designers from internationally known companies. For example, Ecopark, a large new urban area developed by one of the largest Vietnamese real estate companies, involves planning consultants from Singapore (CPG consultants) and urban designers from Japan (KUME design Asia). These are examples of the increasing involvement of foreign developers in the real estate sector and Vietnam’s increasing integration into the global economy.

The allusions to urban forms and images from other successful cities, while clearly being strategies for profit-making, seem to attract many Vietnamese urban dwellers, as they reflect their aspirations to emulate a global lifestyle, a kind of elite dreaming of belonging to the global world of success, wealth and privilege.

**Discussion**

*The relevance of the modernist ethic?*

Master-planned urban developments in the form of NUAs are – in a similar way to the previous KTTs – products of a technocratic, top-down, modernistic planning which has been used by the state to serve its modernization agenda.
Similar to the KTTs, NUAs are illustrative examples of governing through spatial design. True to modernist planning ideals, urban designs are used to create an ‘orderly’ city where the residents’ activities and way of life are regulated through the harmonious housing forms, the ‘orderly’ urban spaces as well as through the disciplining of social conduct.

The modernist dream of all-embracing order and harmony is as vivid as ever in Vietnam’s urban development strategy in general, and in the design of NUAs in particular. Resembling modernist utopian visions such as that of Le Corbusier, the Vietnamese notion of order and beauty is about straight lines and the uniformity of built form, as seen in the effort to impose uniform paving tiles, shop signs of the same colours and sizes, and homogenous housing forms. Urban strategies that focus on order and harmony still bear the ‘modernist ethic’ (Garrido 2013) about how citizens are to live their lives.

There is, however, a significant difference. Whereas earlier modernist urban forms were used to legitimize power and morality, urban and landscape design in NUAs are used to legitimize not only the modernization project and the modernist ethic but also the commodification of housing, social exclusion and segregation. Evoking desirable design attributes from successful cities is a method to legitimize profit-making strategies and proposals, such as the introduction of gated communities, creating new demand for high-tech security walls, as well as blatant spatial segregation.

Residents of NUAs embrace what they consider the modern, civilized lifestyle, even though it requires changes in their daily life: more planning, more discipline, long travel, less neighbourly contact. NUA living is not simply about acquiring a new house but is also a testimony to their new social status, the realization of their modern dream, an affirmation of their belonging to the global world. The emulation of urban forms that represent success and wealth in NUAs can be seen as part of the modernization strategy aiming to create a kind of modern global urbanism that “conforms to an ideal of globalized, cosmopolitan, economically integrated and competitive cities” (Shatkin 2011: 79). As Ong (2011: 209) argued, referencing to successful urban forms not only means capital accumulation but also generating symbolic values about the position of the city in the global scene.
The reality of urban development of Hanoi shows that the modernization project of NUA has not been successful in terms of housing provision. Despite state support, corporate housing production only accounts for less than 15% of the housing stock. More than 70% of the housing stock is still produced incrementally by individuals, households and small entrepreneurs (World Bank 2015). These small actors have proved to be more resourceful both in terms of productivity but also in their capacity to provide solutions that are affordable for people with low incomes. NUAs may create “a resemblance of order” (Till 2009), but it is the chaos and disorder of incremental developments, “strategies of actors in making claims and asserting control over urban space outside state control” (Shatkin 2010: 80), that are the dominant urbanizing forces in Vietnam’s transitional society. These ‘actually existing urbanisms’ pose a challenge to the vision, legitimacy and authority of top-down modernist master planning through acts of spatial appropriation and social behaviour that renounce master planning (Shatkin 2010: 80).

The rigidity of modernist planning – its inability to incorporate social concerns in the quest for utopian visions of progress and its lack of interest in doing so – have become its own downfall (Holston 1989). It will be an interesting move if Vietnam is to embrace a more democratic and contextualized mode of planning that is not based on the preoccupation with order and look for qualities and solutions in the chaotic context of a transforming society.

**Market modernism?**

The case of NUAs shows that in the transition to a market-oriented economy, local authorities and planning institutions still expect to direct urban growth and development using the planning tools and mechanisms from the central planned times. Corporate-driven urban development was promoted, not as a measure of liberalization, but rather one of more state control with the aim of directing urban development and housing production to be in line with state strategies of modernization and globalization. With NUA policies, the state not only directs and controls urban housing development through investment and planning regulations but also the scale of urban development, as well as the form and height of the buildings.

At the same time, there is clear evidence of a market-oriented approach in NUA developments, not least in the overwhelming reliance on private capital for delivering
new housing and urban infrastructure. Many NUAs explicitly promote a prestigious and luxurious lifestyle that is intended exclusively for the wealthy among Vietnam’s urban population. The development of exclusionary urban enclaves is likely to lead to spatial fragmentation and social segregation (Douglass and Huang 2007; Shatkin 2008). Many NUAs promote “profit making values at the expense of use values, social needs and public goods” (Peck et al. 2013: 1092).

NUAs may be seen to produce a hybrid urbanism in which the ideals of socialist modernism combine with economic-driven incentives (Labbé and Musil 2013; McGee 2009; Schwenkel and Leshkowich 2012). NUAs are expressions of a form of ‘market modernism’, a term coined by Leaf (2015: 170) which “emphasize(s) the fundamental profit motivation [behind the development] and the role of market mechanisms for its delivery”. Market modernism is a hybrid product of a transitional system brought about by complex interactions between the emerging market imperatives and the changing socialist legacy (Gainsborough 2010). Underlying the conception of market modernism is the still-pervading goal of modernization and the belief in the moral capacity of modernist design solutions in shaping urban and social life.

Even though the social orientation of earlier modernist reform is being replaced by an emphasis on the economically motivated incentives, ‘market modernism’ can still claim its legitimacy as a continuation of the political rhetoric of ‘socialist modernism’ which has been framed in the socialist era as an ideological motivator for nation building (Tran and Yip forthcoming). This is a point of concern as it provides governments, planners and developers with the legitimacy to promote profit-driven urban solutions that only benefit the already well-off. The modernization discourse needs to be challenged and its use to dampen resistance towards the undesirable impacts of market-driven planning uncovered.

References


1 The Vietnamese word is dong bo, which can be translated as ‘synchronized’ but can also mean ‘uniform’ (to be alike).


3 parkcityhanoi.vn/tieu-khu-1-park-city-hanoi.

